DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 009 CG 026 851

TITLE	Guide for the School Psychologist: A System for the Promotion of Diversified Psychological Services in Schools.
INSTITUTION	American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	[93]
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrators; Consultants; Elementary Secondary Education; Intergroup Relations; Psychological Evaluation; *Psychological Services; School Counseling; *School Psychologists; *Social Networks; *Workshops

ABSTRACT

Psychologists who work in schools are prepared to provide a broad range of services. However, some school systems do not avail themselves of the myriad services which psychologists can competently deliver. Direct services, which incorporate assessment for special education, counseling, and other forms of therapy services, occupy the major time of psychologists employed in schools. Despite obvious needs for programs to address a wide range of issues (e.g., substance abuse, teenage suicide, antisocial behavior) as well as crisis intervention programs to deal with immediate disasters, and health promotion programs, all resources available through psychology often are not included in school district plans for the delivery of psychological services. This brochure outlines recommendations for a workshop format and follow-up strategies that school psychologists may use to make contacts with school administrators. It was developed so as to increase the perceived relevance of diversified psychological services in the schools. It is hoped that by increasing school administrators' knowledge of psychological issues, school psychologists will be recognized for potential contributions they have to make and will be sanctioned to provide a wide range of services, including consultation, psychological counseling, assessment, research and program evaluation, and staff development, within school settings. An appendix describes pilot projects from which the recommendations evolved. (JBJ)

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ED 392 009

GUIDE FOR THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

A System for the Promotion of Diversified Psychological Services in Schools

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
A Challenge for Psychology	2
Recommendations	3
Appendix	7

INTRODUCTION

Psychologists who work in schools are prepared to provide a broad range of services. However, some school systems do not avail themselves of the myriad services which psychologists can competently deliver.

Direct services, which incorporate assessment for special education, counseling, and other forms of therapy services, occupy the major time of psychologists employed in schools. Despite obvious needs for programs to address a wide range of issues (e.g., substance abuse, teenage suicide, antisocial behavior), as well as crisis intervention programs to deal with immediate disasters, and health promotion programs (e.g., parent education and teacher training), all resources available through psychology often are not included in school district plans for the delivery of psychological services.

In order to increase the perceived relevance of diversified psychological services in the schools, this brochure, which outlines a workshop format that school psychologists may use, was developed. It is hoped that by increasing school administrators' knowledge of psychological issues, school psychologists will be recognized for potential contributions they have to make and will be sanctioned to provide a wide range of services, including consultation, psychological counseling, assessment, research and program evaluation, and staff development, within school settings.

Who Are the Innovators In School Settings?

Psychologists, who study the behavior of organizations, recognize that effective innovation requires the sanction of those who are at the top of the administrative ladder, however, innovations proceed only when administrators personally identify the project as their own. Although patterns are changing with the educational reform movement, school districts typically have long-standing hierarchical structures and traditional functions. Broader uses of psychological services will occur when the value of diversification is recognized and demonstrably supported by the superintendent of schools, or possibly in larger districts, the assistant superintendents.

A CHALLENGE FOR PSYCHOLOGY

How do psychologists establish and maintain communication with high-level administrators, most of whom have had little contact with the field of psychology beyond an introductory course in educational psychology? Superintendents confront myriad problems on a daily basis, attempting to balance demands from school boards, community, staff, and even outspoken pupils. Achieving a balance among these demands, while continuing to operate within the bounds of stringent budget constraints, is a hallmark of success in the superintendent's position.Thus, when a district school psychologist presents an idea for innovative action to the superintendent, the request may well be viewed as one more demand, probably requiring additional funds, and may be rejected without full exploration of the concept.

One answer to the dilemma may exist in communicating with top administrators outside of their offices, in settings where they feel more comfortable, in the company of other school administrators attending their own professional meetings. Here they are part of the group rather than

singled out as the target of yet another demand. Under these conditions, they may be open to consider new ideas and to share their reactions to these ideas with their colleagues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested as ways to facilitate communication with organizations of school administrators. These guidelines were developed by the APA Task Force on Psychology in the Schools and reflect the Task Force's experiences gained through several pilot projects carried out during the period from 1986 to 1988. These experiences are detailed in the Appendix of this brochure.

The recommendations are by no means the only way to proceed, as each area of our country has its own unique problems and styles of functioning. Psychologists in the region are responsible for learning the organizational "ropes" and appropriate contacts in order to "custom tailor" their approach. However, during its work, the Task Force learned of some approaches that are effective as well as certain pitfalls to be avoided, and wishes to share this knowledge with other individuals or groups who plan to embark on similar projects.

The goal of improving communication between psychology and those who make education policy requires an ongoing commitment. The workshop format described in the Appendix is not intended to trigger just a single occasion event, but rather, hopefully, to provide a framework for the beginning of a regular dialogue for school psychologists with school administrators as they seek resources to meet increasing demands on their schools.

Recommendations that have evolved out of the experiences of the Task Force on Psychology in the Schools are presented next for your consideration.

1. Getting on the Convention Program of Administrator Groups

- Ideally, it is better for an invitation to originate with the administrators than to have to try to convince the group that you can produce an interesting program. Receiving an invitation is not always as easy as it may sound. The administrators' program committee may not be likely to take risks, such as inviting "strangers" from outside their own field. They want to have firm ideas of what will be presented and how it is likely to go over with their membership.

Suggestions:

- Present a "model" program at local, state or regional psychologist meetings. Invite a prominent school administrator to be a participant. A return invitation may well ensue.
- Identify a school psychologist who actually has implemented an innovative program in the schools. That psychologist can suggest to the district superintendent that the program be presented at an administrators' meeting. This activity may be sanctioned since many superintendents like to display themselves as successful promoters of innovation.

2. Selecting the Topic(s)

- The choice of topics for presentation is a key issue if you want to attract participants to your program. Awareness of the major problems facing administrators in the area, state, or region and focusing the presentation on innovative (yet cost-effective) ways of dealing with those problems is essential.

Suggestions:

- Select topics that are consistent with the special conference theme of the administrators' meeting.

- Illustrate school-based programs that have demonstrably positive outcomes.
- Present topics that are well backed with sound psychological research.
- Emphasize ways in which programs can be replicated in other school settings. Have data available on the cost of the project.

3. Planning the Program

- Program presentations that are interesting, nontechnical, and offered by skilled presenters are essential. When administrators take time away from their offices to attend a convention, they do not want to listen to someone delivering a technical paper. They want to learn of projects or approaches that they could visualize being implemented in their own districts. At the same time, they want to know that the project's technical background information, statistics, and research bases are available.

Suggestions:

- Prepare a "briefing sheet" on each topic. This should not exceed one page in length and should give a capsule overview of the project.
- Prepare a second page of references listing where further information on the topic can be obtained.
- Prepare a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of the key people involved in the project to enable those interested in obtaining further information or arranging a visit.
- As part of the information packet, give addresses and telephone numbers of state associations of psychologists and school psychologists as well as the state department of education's director of school psychological services.

- In scheduling, avoid too many presentations. Experience-based consensus has shown that no more than two topics may provide an optimal opportunity for audience participation and reaction.
- Keep presentations reasonably short to provide ample time for questions and discussion.
- Get a list of names and addresses of those administrators who attend. They may well be candidates for participation in subsequent meetings of psychologists.

4. Follow-up

- Continued communication with those who expressed an interest in the topic is the hallmark of effective planning.

Suggestions:

- Prepare a news release including brief descriptions of the topics and names of presenters and attendees. Send this to local newspapers and to publications of both administrators' organizations and psychological associations.
- Send additional information on the topic to those attendees who expressed interest.

APPENDIX

Pilot Projects from which Recommendations Evolved

Step 1 - 1986

A tuition-free invitational workshop for school administrators was presented in the period immediately preceding the APA convention in Washington, DC, in August 1986. The workshop was titled "Good News for School Administrators: Innovative Approaches to School Psychological Services." Educational administrators from the Eastern region of the country were contacted. Identification of school administrators who might be interested in participating was accomplished through contacts with state coordinators of school psychological services who were asked to nominate outstanding administrators in their respective states; nominees then were invited to the full-day workshop. Twenty-three administrators, ranging from school superintendents to directors of pupil personnel services, accepted the invitation. They represented a variety of districts (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural) from nine states.

The program focused on three major problem areas that would be of general concern to administrators: substance abuse, antisocial behavior, and enhancement of academic achievement. Presenters who had developed and implemented innovative programs were invited to describe their programs and then meet with "breakout groups" immediately following their presentations to respond to specific questions on implementation. Packets containing brief descriptions of each program and sources of additional information were presented to workshop participants.

An evaluation of the workshop by participants yielded the greatest number of positive responses from those who

were district-wide administrators as compared with those who were administrators of school psychological services.

Step 2 - 1987

A report on the Administrators' Workshop was presented as part of a panel on diversification of school psychological services at the 1987 APA convention. We were fortunate to have as discussant on the panel Dr. Donald Merachnik who is both a psychologist and a superintendent of schools. Acknowledging the importance of developing communication between psychology and high-level school administrators, he presented quite graphically the superintendent's eye view of psychologists.

Step 3 - 1988

Efforts were made to replicate the workshop model at administrators' meetings in diverse parts of the country. Programs were presented at meetings in Texas and New Jersey. In each instance, modifications were made to meet the requirements of the particular audience.

PSYCHOLOGY IN THE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Mission Statement

The Psychology in the Schools Program in the Practice Directorate of the American Psychological Association is the focal point within the association where issues pertaining to the practice of psychology in school settings are addressed. Furthermore, since the majority of psychological practice in schools is conducted by school psychologists, this group represents a key constituency for the program. In addition, the issues faced by school psychologists who practice in hospitals, mental health centers, agencies, universities, or other settings, including private practice, are areas of concentration. The program engages in political and professional advocacy and policy development in response to both guild and professional practice issues that face practicing psychologists who seek to provide quality services to children, youth, families, school and agency staff, and systems.

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